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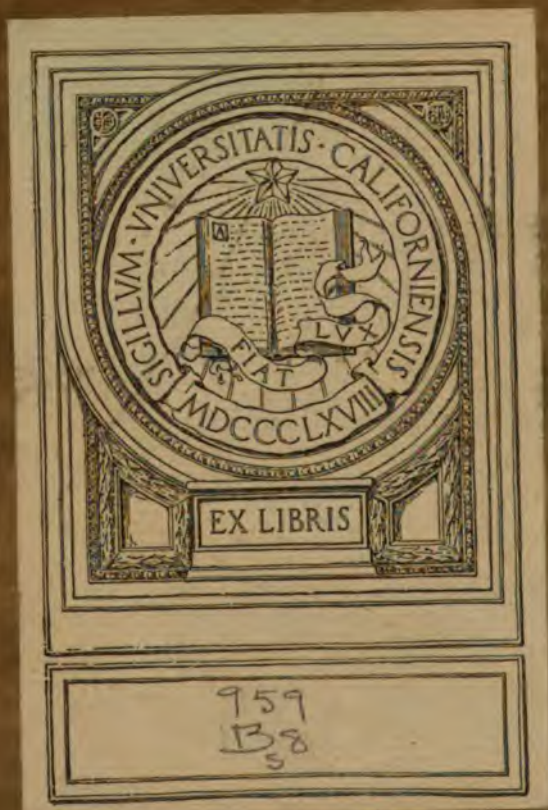
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Singing Carr



WILLIAM ASPENWALL BRADLEY

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Singing Carr



SINGING CARR
& *Other Song-Ballads of the*
CUMBERLANDS

BY

William Aspenwall Bradley



UNIV. OF
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1918

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❧ FIRST EDITION ❧

TO VNU
ALBANY, N.Y.

TO THE READER

THESE poems were written last summer, in the course of a second long ramble through the Kentucky Cumberlands — some in the saddle, almost, others during a prolonged stay at Hindman, my home in the mountains. Three, "Singing Carr," "The Blind Boy," and "Sourwood Mountain," were printed in the local paper, "The Little Star," from which the first found its way into a wider circulation. This little piece owes its title to Mr. Howard Brockway, the composer, who visited the mountains two years ago, with Miss Loraine Wyman, in search of those "song-ballets" with which, both on the concert platform and through their "Lonesome Tunes," they have since become so closely identified. On his return, Mr. Brockway happened to speak of "Singing Carr," and said he had heard the creek called Carr's Fork, thus "named" by the natives. I had never heard it myself, nor could I find anyone who had, when I went back there. In the meantime, however, I had written the verses, and was not sorry I had done so; for, surely, no one acquainted with that famous creek would quarrel with the appellation thus bestowed upon it. It is, indeed, "Singing Carr," though perhaps not all the "citizens" are as averse to profane balladry as I have intimated! Even the members of the Old Carr Church are a vigorous, vital lot, both men and women, and do not enjoy life the less because of their peculiar religious principles. I am not likely to forget a night I once spent among them. It was noon when we left Hindman, a bright October day, the bottoms tawny with blown broom-sedge, the hills dyed purple and pale primrose with "Farewell Summer," and the water in the creeks reflecting the deep azure of the sky, as they parted swiftly past rocks of gleaming golden ochre; but it was nearly dark when,

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crossing Irishman Mountain, the gateway of its burying-ground quaintly inscribed with the words, "God Rest Those Sleeps Here," we descended on the waters of Carr, and reached our destination. This was a big cabin set somewhat back from the main creek, on a "branch," where all the family, warned of our coming, had assembled to receive us. There must have been nearly thirty—men, women, and children—that night about the sputtering coal fire. In the centre of the circle sat the old grandmother, an impressive figure in her black dress and with her crimson scarf drawn close about her white hair and her bold, handsome face, a network of fine wrinkles. When the inevitable flat bottle was produced, it was handed first to her. "Well, I hain't no hypocrite, an' I don't mind owning I do like my little dram," she said, as she tilted it to her lips. Then it passed round the entire circle, coming last to a young mother who poured out a spoonful of the corn liquor and gave the soothing dose to her fretful infant. It was then that the telephone bell rang and I first learned of this singular substitute for the phonograph—"canned music in the mountains." The other poems are compounded about equally of legendary lore and of matter that came under my immediate observation—with one or two of a more imaginative turn. It is my hope that the little group, as a whole, may give an even more intimate impression of the mountain life and character than friendly readers professed to find in the longer narrative poems of my first collection, "Old Christmas."

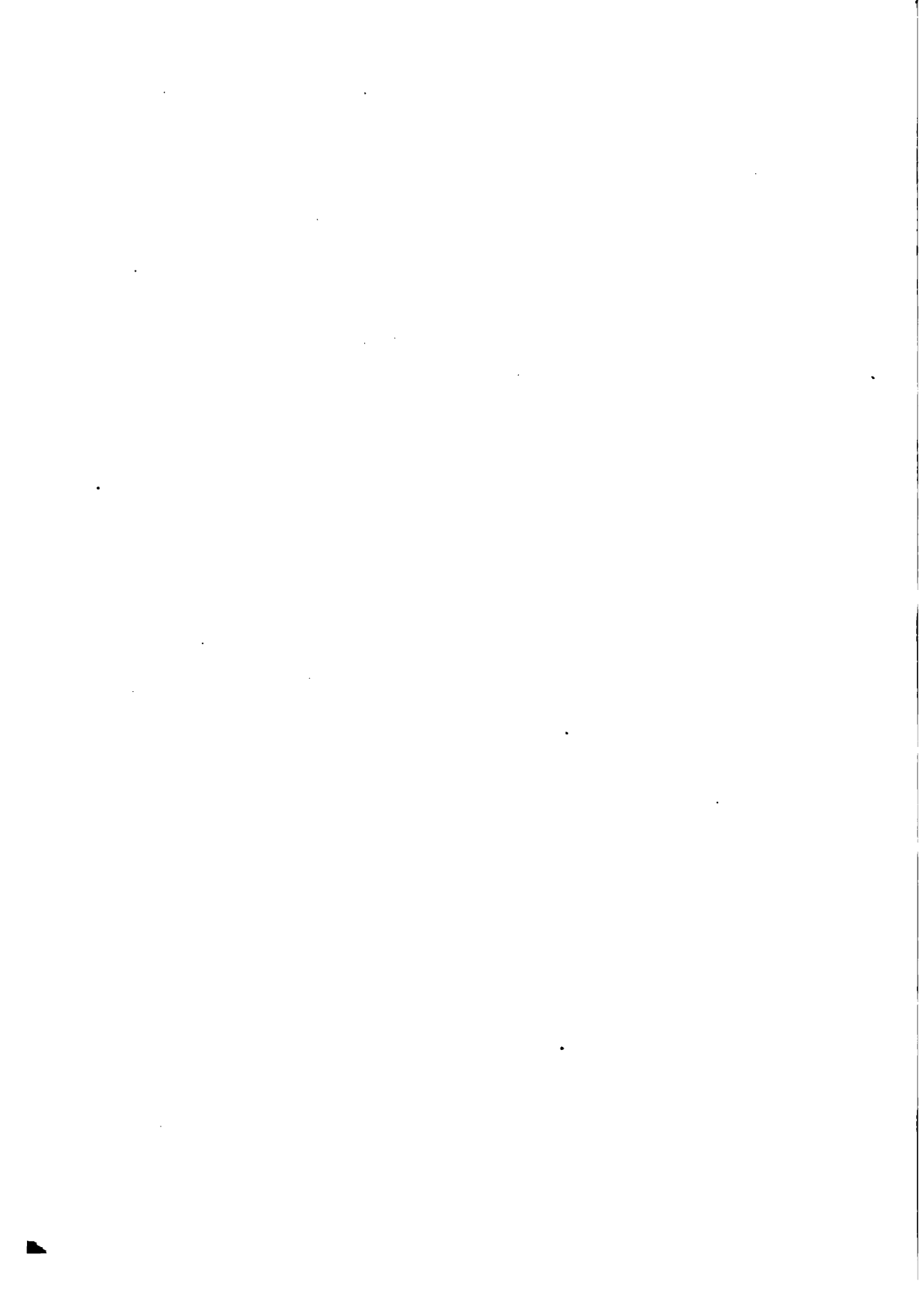
W. A. B.

*New Haven, Connecticut
November, 1917*

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Singing Carr



The Sanger's Call

I'm tired. My old hands tremble so
They scarcely now can hold the hoe.
And yet I cannot seem to stay
From yon steep points. Alone to-day
Weary I go to seek for sang,
Where every wooded ridge once rang:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!"
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

Alone, alone! Where are they fled,
Who, when the seed grew ripe and red,
Climbed high, a happy-hearted throng,
With many an old-time ballet-song,
Then scattered, and he first who found
The berries, made the hollows sound:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!"
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

And there was one who climbed with me,
A dark-eyed boy. I seem to see
Even now his laughing face, his curls,
His body slender as a girl's.
Even now seems like I still can hear
His voice, like water, singing clear:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!"
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

Once, when we two had strayed apart,
I saw a rattler's forked tongue dart,
Saw his bright coils, and heard him sing.
I could not strike the evil thing,
Or run. Sick terror held me fast.
Swooning I stood, but cried at last:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!"
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

To VINU
Alison JAO

He heard my stricken cry, and came.
And while the serpent's livid flame
Held me, with its foul magic, still,
I saw him, running, take the hill,
Felt him strike thrice and break the charm,
Then heard, within his circling arm:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!"
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

We were sworn lovers from that hour,
Promised to wed when trees should flower.
What I sang out, I laid aside
To buy a dress, for me, a bride,
And I went singing, as I found
Each pod of berries on the ground:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!"
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

All that long winter, in my room,
I shot the shuttle of the loom,
And watched the webs of linen grow
As high and white as drifted snow
That covered every point and all
The slopes where we had heard the call:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!"
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

Spring came, and as the hour drew near,
There sprang up in my heart a fear,
And nights, as I lay still in bed,
I thought I saw my lover dead,
With his red slayer standing by,
Or woke, and heard a warning cry:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!"
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

I knew he had a jealous foe.
I begged; I bade him, not to go

To get our papers at the town.
I did not fear folks' talk or frown,
And would have followed him, had he
But whispered, some night, one soft "*Hee-pee!*
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

My lover laughed and rode away.
I sat there by my loom all day.
'Twas late that night before I slept.
Next morning, as the gray dawn crept,
Slow-footed, through the silent room,
I saw him laid across the loom:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

I felt his hands, and they were cold.
Even in death they kept their hold
Of something—papers folded tight.
I took them from him—'twas my right—
Our marriage papers, signed and sealed.
Again I saw the snake, and reeled:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

Since then I've kept them here inside
My bosom, I, a dead man's bride,
Who've lived for fifty years unwed.
They'll find them on me when I'm dead,
And lay them with me, underground,
Where never more will come the sound:
"Hee-pee-oo-oo! Hee-pee-oo-oo!
"Hee-pee! Yee-ou!"

I'm tired. My old hands tremble so
They scarcely now can hold the hoe.
Yet I am glad . . . I would not stay . . .
Let me but climb once more, to-day,

To look for sang . . . What's that I hear? . . .
The sangers' call rings loud and clear:
"*Hee-pee-oo-oo! . . . Hee-pee-oo-oo! . . .*
"*Hee-pee! . . . Yee-ou! . . .*"

The British Lady

I saw a British Lady, as I came down the lane.
Against the cliffs above the creek, it made a crimson stain.
O bright-winged bird, when shall I see my pretty boy again?

I saw him first when last I saw you there in yonder tree,
And knew I was the maid for him, he was the man for me.
For she who sees your glowing wings, her husband soon shall see.

My husband! So he would have been, had not the war-call torn
Him from my arms, though not my heart, and left me here to mourn
Alone, but for my little babe—my little babe unborn.

Lullaby

PRETTY poppet, do not cry,
Though your mammy's breast be dry.
She will feed you by and by

Soon as pappy brings some meat,
Or some corn, so she can eat
For her precious sugar sweet.

Here they's neither meat nor bread.
Now you sleep so still in bed . . .
Wake! or pappy'll think you're dead!

Wake, then, pretty poppet, wake!
Don't you feel your mammy shake? . . .
God on high! . . . My heart will break! . . .

A Mountain Mother

THEY tell me that my son must die,
And yet I cannot seem to cry.
For he is nearer now, in death,
Than ever since his earliest breath—
Since first I gave him suck, and he
Looked up from my breast and smiled at me—
My little son who should repay
His father's bloody debt some day.

Oh, ay, his borning cost me sore.
The very night my brothers bore
His father home, my pains began.
And I, who should have had my man
To hold me close upon his knee,
Must lie low in my bed and see
The old mid-woman nodding there
Beside the wood-fire, in her chair.

But when, at last, my pains were done,
And to my breast I clutched my son,
I knew what custom I must use.
I took and drew my dead man's shoes
Upon my feet; upon my head
I placed his hat, then from the bed
I struggled up, stood on the ground,
And, though all turned, I walked around

For must have been an hour, to dreen
Myself and make my body clean,
Like my dead man, when still in life.
I made the mid-woman take her knife,
And, when from his back the blood she pressed,
Mix it with milk warm from my breast,
And give it to the child, to make
Him strong for his dead father's sake.

Swiftly more strong I watched him grow.
Yet days and years were all too slow
Till he could hold his father's gun.
Then it was I who taught my son
To handle it, take steady aim.
On bits of board I wrote a name,
And nailed them to a walnut tree,
Or drew a head for him to see. . . .

And all I feared from that first night
Was that some other, upstart, might
Claim vengeance that was his and mine.
One day, I recollect, came nine
Armed men hot riding on *his* track.
I dared to lie, and turn them back,
Though they'd have killed me, had they known.
The prey was ours—and ours alone.

And then, at last, the day drew nigh . . .
Each time I bade my boy goodbye,
I felt a nameless dread, a fear,
And something seemed to clutch me here,
When I armed him with my own hand.
To-day he saw the slayer stand
Before the court-house, in the street.
Both fired, both fell, but to his feet

My boy sprang up to shoot again.
There was no need. Two neighbor men
Caught him before once more he fell,
Brought him to me, that he might tell,
With his own lips the tale I've told.
No matter now if, young or old,
I die at last, all in God's plan.
I've known, and I have raised a man. . . .

The Fiddler

FIDDLER, fiddler, where do you go
On your pried nag, with fiddle and bow?|'

"To the Breaks o' Ball they have sent for me
To fiddle all night at a Christmas tree."

"Fiddler, fiddler, the Breaks are far,
The nights are dark, with never a star,
The roads are rough, and the creeks are wide,
With never a light your steps to guide.
So fiddler, fiddler, get you down,
And play for the Hales o' Harlan town,
Play for the Hales and stay all night,
Then start for the Breaks with the dawning light."

"For the Hales in their house I dare not play.
Tonight their foes line all the way,
And I heard one say, as I rode by:
'Who stays with the Hales, with the Hales shall die.' "

"Fiddler, fiddler, have no fear.
My four brave sons with their guns are here,
And all in their graves must first lie dead,
Ere harm can come to a stranger's head,
When the Hales have opened to him their door.
So fiddler, fiddler, say no more,
But get you down, for the hour grows late,
And lead your nag through the swinging gate."

So he got him down, and he took his seat
At the board, where they gave him bread and meat,
And many a dram from the bucket nigh,
Till the fiddler's fearful heart beat high,
And he thought no more of the boastful word
The Deans had spoken, and he had heard.

"Now, fiddler, fiddler, take you a chair,
And draw it up to the hearthside there.
For again tonight I long to hear
'Weevilly Wheat' and 'Forkèd Deer.'
And each of my four stout sons shall stand
At a door, with his rifle-gun in hand.
So fiddler, fiddler, have no care
For what lurks low in the black night air."

So the fiddler tightened up his bow,
And over the strings he drew it slow,
With a wistful, wavering, mournful sound,
Dropped it again, and glanced around
At each bearded face in the flickering light.
Then, grasping his fiddle, he held it tight,
And over the frets his fingers ran,
As he struck up the tune of "Callahan,"
So all who sat in that room could see
How Callahan stepped to the gallows tree,
And fiddled the piece that he had made,
While he lay long in the prison shade.
And not one there in that shadowy room
But felt in his own dark soul the doom,
As the soul of the fiddle sobbed and cried,
Till the lamp burned dim, and the embers died.

"Now fiddler, fiddler, lay you down,
And sleep as safe in Harlan town,
As ever at home in your bed you slept."

But the fiddler stirred when the gray dawn crept
Through the cabin room, and he crossed the floor,
Where the sleepers lay, to the stout-barred door,
Drew back the bars, and flung it wide,
Then stepped to the washing-block outside.

"Now fiddler, fiddler, have you a care.
Death lurks low in the bushes there.

Remember the word when you rode by:
'Who stays with the Hales, with the Hales shall die.' "

But the fiddler's thoughts were far away.
He must ride to the Christmas tree that day,
And he dreamed of the dance and the lighted hall
That awaited him at the Breaks o' Ball,
Nor heard he a stealthy step draw near.
Then a rifle rang out loud and clear,
And, shot through the heart, the fiddler fell
From the porch to the earth, beside the well.

*"Fiddler, fiddler, where do you go
On your pided nag, with fiddle and bow?"*

*"To the Breaks o' Ball they have sent for me
To fiddle all night at a Christmas tree."*

*"Fiddler, fiddler, the Breaks are far,
The nights are dark, with never a star.
The roads are rough, and the creeks are wide,
With never a light your steps to guide,
And the Christmas tree and the dancers' hall
Shall await you in vain at the Breaks o' Ball."*

Morgan's Men

"O you who ride so hot along the creek, who may you be?"
"We're men who fought with Morgan's band, come up from Tennessee."

"You're men o' Morgan's Rebel band? Then tell us why you go
Each one o' nine, with a new plow-line hung at his saddle-bow?"

"We do not care to tell you why. We ride both night and day
To hunt her out and hang her high, who Morgan did betray."

"And who was she that did this deed, now troopers plainly tell?"
"She lived within the foemen's lines, and Morgan loved her well."

"He loved her well?" "Ay, more than life, and one dark night he
rode
By rippling creek and rustling wood, till he came to her abode."

"What did he there the long night through?" "In her soft arms he lay.
But when, at last, he turned and slept, she rose and stole away

"To the stable-yard, and saddled soon, and galloped till she came
To the leader, who stirred within his tent, and told him all
her shame."

"What said he then?" "No word he spoke, but spat upon
the ground,
Woke one with him who slumbered deep, and straight the word
went round

"That Morgan was within their power. A hundred men and more,
Booted and spurred, swept towards the south, till they came
to the lady's door.

"They came to the door o' the false lady, who back with them did ride,
And slipping swift from her saddle there, stole soft to Morgan's side.

“ ‘O Morgan, they’ve come to take you, dear!’ she made her false voice speak.
And Morgan, who leapt from his bed to the door, looked out upon the creek.

“Looked out upon the creek and saw the cliffs in the gray dawn,
And the close blue ring, like a strangler’s string, about the cabin drawn.

“ ‘Now Morgan, Morgan, yield you up. You see we hold you fast!’ ”
The leader stopped and clutched his breast. Those bold words were his last.

“For Morgan shot him where he stood, then started through the ring.
But a crashing volley brought him down, and he lay a lifeless thing.

“He lay a crumpled, lifeless thing, all huddled as he fell,
While she stood near and shed no tear, whom Morgan had loved well.

“So that is the reason why we ride, and why you see us go
Each one o’ nine, with a new plow-line hung at his saddle-bow.

“For east and west and north and south, we hunt the false lady,
Who brought about brave Morgan’s death, to hang her to a tree.”

Travels [From Nature to Grace]

'TWAS in yon field the vision came.
The corn-clad hillside turned to flame,
And I, who followed there the row,
Dazzled and blinded, dropped my hoe,
Fell to my knees, and could not rise.
For who that saw, with living eyes,
A million angels in one band,
Shining like stars, could hope to stand
Firm and erect on his two feet?
At first I thought it was the heat—
The sun was hot, I was not well.
The day before I'd took a spell,
Felt dizzy like, things turned around.
But, when I looked again, I found
They was still there, the Seraphim.
I tried to pray, to start a hymn,
But could not speak, my tongue was tied.
Then, clapping their hands, they sang and cried:
'Now glory to God, the King o' Kings!'
And shook their shining, rustling wings,
Like corn that starts to shock an' tassel.
Then something in me seemed to wrastle,
Like a new infant seeking birth.
I fell down flat along the earth,
And shook. I knew that, till that hour,
The Devil had held me in his power,
That he fought hard to hold me now.
Cold sweat came out upon my brow,
I struggled, twisted, writhed, and turned,
While all the time the angels burned,
Like candles guttering in a gale.
A terror came—if they should fail!
I should be damned, beyond a doubt.
But nary candle flickered out,
Just went on getting brighter still,

Each on its little separate hill,
Where I had heaped the earth with care.
Then, when 'twas more than I could bear,
Sudden the torment seemed to cease.
I felt a flooding tide o' peace,
Like water, when the splash-head goes.
A love sprang up for all my foes.
I could sit down with them and eat—
Could even kneel an' wash their feet.
Came on me then what I must do.
I must stand in the public view
Next meeting, tell what I had seen.
I did not care to say how mean
I'd been, how I had sinned through life,
Swore, lied, got drunk, and beat my wife.
For now I knew I was forgiven
By them bright angels, come from heaven!

Saint Francis on Quicksand

FOLKS think, because I preach the Word,
To bush and tree, to beast and bird,
Because I dip a stick or stone,
At times—as if 'twere man alone
That had a soul to save through Grace!—
That I am cracked. They jeer and chase
Me from the church, when I begin
To tell them of their deadly sin
In killing creatures every day.
Last week I saw a squirrel pray
On yonder little leafy limb.
Just then a boy took aim at him
And brought him down. Fierce anger flamed.
I thundered at the boy and named
Him slayer, killer of his kind.
He feared what might be in my mind
And fled—fled faster at my call.
Right there I preached the funeral
Of that poor little furry thing.
And, as I preached, I heard a wing,
Then wing on wing, and I could see
Dim forms of birds in every tree,
And the bright beads of squirrels' eyes.
I felt God's spirit in me rise.
My voice rose to the holy tone.
Folks say they heard me shout and moan
For most a mile. The hills drew near,
The ridges bowed as if to hear,
While overhead the elements
Piled tier on tier their snowy tents,
Where, dark within, my eyes could see
The Father's awful majesty,
And I knew he had heard my call,
Who sees each bird and squirrel fall.

The Blind Boy

BACK from the blue-grass country, and I'm glad I'm home again.
A boy like me can't find his way along the level plain.
But here in the narrow valley, where the blind don't miss the sky,
They's the water of the singing stream for me to wander by.
And just one trail leads up the creek, and just one trail leads down,
Not like the roads that fork and cross in countryside and town.

So when I'm done with filling quills to feed my mother's loom,
And tired o' picking banjo tunes or binding up the broom,
I ramble up and down Quicksand for miles and miles each day,
Under the cliffs and by the bank, and never lose my way,
And hear a sight o' pretty sounds that sort o' fill my mind,
And make me dream, till I forget, almost, that I am blind.

The Child and the Rattler

PRETTY snake, I see you glide
From the brush heap, by my side.
Come here closer, if you wish,
Eat with me from my own dish
Mammy filled with mush and cream.
I like to see your golden gleam,
Hear the pretty sound you make.
You are hungry, poor old snake!
Wisht I had a little meat—
A chicken wing for you to eat.
Stop! You can't have *all* my share!
That's *your* side, right over there!
Didn't you hear what I said?
I'll *hit* you, then, old speckly-head!

[The child hits the snake with its spoon, the snake coils, strikes the child,² and glides away.]

There! You've hurt me, snake, yet I
Cannot seem to scream or cry.
Something grips me, holds me still.
Wait till daddy comes from mill.
He'll go hunt you from that heap.
Now I only want to sleep.
[Drowsily.] I'll tell daddy, when I wake.
Then he'll kill you . . . bad old . . . snake!

The Feudist on the War

WELL, stranger, what about the war? You say you're from New York. Then you must know a whole heap more than folks on Folger's Fork, Who don't go stirring much abroad, can scarcely read the news. Yet sit at night here by the fire, and kindly give their views How the thing started, how 'twill end. Will our boys have to go Away across the briny deep? We wouldn't mind it so If we could fight it out at home. Then all would take a hand, Squander the Germans mightily, and drive them from the land. Us mountain fellers loves to fight. But s'pose them vessels sank Out yonder there, with all on board, before they hit the bank? Hit's powerful hard for us to cross this creek, when they's a tide, And I allow the ocean's more'n a hundred times as wide As any creek, or river, too—a hundred times as deep. Yet Sunday last our preacher told the mothers not to weep, For God would keep the ones they loved as safely in His care, Beneath the sea, as though they lay on some green point up there Above the waving fields o' corn, and underneath the sky. So we will send them forth to fight, and die—if they must die!

The Doubles

ONE day as I lingered beside a deep pool,
I saw a young maiden, who rode a dark mule.
All in white from her head to her foot she was dressed—
The trim little foot in the steel stirrup pressed—
While the cloth of her saddle was flowered with red,
And a gay crimson tassel swung at her steed's head.

She rode, and the bridle that hung from her hand,
So slender and white, held my heart in a band.
And I longed to look full on the face of the maid,
That the brim of her sunbonnet shrouded with shade.
I stopped her, and laid a bold hand on her rein,
But drew back in horror, and dropped it again.

For the sunbonnet sheltered no smiling young face,
But a skull that leered out, with a grinning grimace,
Through sockets uncurtained and bony and bare.
I shrank, with cold sweat, from that terrible stare,
And, gazing down into the depths of the pool,
Saw Death mirrored there, on the back of a mule.

"Singing Carr"

Now glory to the Lord o' Hosts, from Whom all glories are,
An' glory to His tuneful saints, that live on Singing Carr,
Where people say no sinful songs, nor ballets new an' fine,
But spread the Gospel far an' nigh, by singing on the line.

At night, when folks sit by the fire, an' pass the bottle round,
They're like to hear the little bell, that makes a tinkling sound.
Then one starts up an' claps his ear, to hear who's calling "nine."
"It is the Saints o' Carr," he cries, "a-singing on the line!"

"Come, folks, an' hear the Saints o' Carr, they're singing sweet an' loud!"
Then all put the flat bottle by, an' to the box close crowd,
So each can listen in his turn, an' slake his soul with wine
That flows from lips o' Saints o' Carr, a-singing on the line.

They's no corn licker half so good, so pure, so sweet, so strong,
As music made by Saints o' Carr, in some old Gospel song.
If you should hear the Methodists, 'twould seem a dismal whine,
Once you had heard the Carr's Fork Saints a-singing on the line.

But best of all, us folks round here, we loves to hear 'em sing
That song belongs at funerals, "Been a long time travelling."
It makes you sort o' think o' death, sends shivers down your spine,
To hear it sung by Saints o' Carr, upon the people's line.

For each of us at last must die, be buried underground.
I'm studying if, when safe above, they'll come the tinkling sound,
Some night, o' that peart little bell. 'Pears like my soul will pine
To hear, in heaven, the Saints o' Carr, a-singing on the line!

Mother Goose on Goose Creek

SING a song of sixpence,
Pappy's in the pen,
Mammy's riding up the creek
To git him out agen.

Pappy drank some lickar,
Killed a man named Brown.
Now they say he's helping Doc,
Down at Frankfort town.

Pappy'll git good manners,
Larn to read an' write.
Soon he'll run for county clerk.
Won't that be a sight?

Pretties

I know a small cabin all bowered in green.
Its walls are worn gray, but its yard is swept clean.
It stands in a lane running down to the creek,
And when I ride by there, I hear a voice speak:
"Get down, get down, stranger, whoever you be,
And have you a pretty, a pretty, from me."

I look and I see an old woman who stands
At a gap in the palings, her gifts in her hands—
Her hands that are wrinkled and knotted and brown—
And whose sunbonnet bobs, as she bids me get down:
"Get down, get down, stranger, whoever you be,
And have you a pretty, a pretty, from me."

"They's the prettiest pretties that ever you see,
Cut after the leaves of a green poplar tree,
Of an oak, and a beech, and such other like leaves,
And they's stars and they's hearts for the fond heart that grieves.
So get you down, stranger, whoever you be,
And have you a pretty, a pretty, from me."

"I make them myself, and they's none that can show
Such pretties. I cut them from gay calico,
Red, yellow, and blue, and I sew them up all
In pictures and posies, to put on the wall.
So get you down, stranger, whoever you be,
And have you a pretty, a pretty, from me."

I get down from my horse, and my heart being sore,
I take the most sorrowful heart from her store,
Surrounded by leaves from the tree that no care
Can ever again bring a blossom to bear,
And crowned by the star that once ruled in my sky.
I remount and ride on, but still, faint, comes the cry:
"Get down, get down, stranger, whoever you be,
And have you a pretty, a pretty, from me."

"Sourwood Mountain"

[Andy Johnson, of Bell County, waylaid a man named Hoskins, at the same time shooting Hoskins' little daughter, Biddy, on the wagon seat beside him. For twenty-four hours Johnson would let no one approach the bodies but Hoskins' wife, who watched over them and drove away the hogs.]

CHICKEN crowing on Sourwood Mountain.
Hey ho diddle dum day.
Get my gun an' I'll go hunting.
Hey do diddle dum day.

Sun shines hot in Possum Hollow.
Hey ho diddle dum day,
Big hogs root, little pigs wallow.
Hey ho diddle dum day.

Rumbling wheels, little gal singing.
Hey do diddle dum day.
Rifle crack, the cliffs a-ringing.
Hey ho diddle dum day.

Whiff o' blood comes up the hollow.
Hey ho diddle dum day.
Big hogs run, little pigs follow.
Hey ho diddle dum day.

Bodies in the muck a-lying.
Hey ho diddle dum day.
Little gal dead, old man a-dying.
Hey ho diddle dum day.

Liz sits by, a long switch swinging.
Hey ho diddle dum day.
Drives the hogs an' keeps on singing:
"Hey ho diddle dum day."

The Ballad-Collector

SAY fellers, did ye see the man passed by here down the creek?
I met wi' him a-hoeing corn, last Wednesday was a week.
I knowed he warn't no mineral man—warn't sharp enough fer that.
He wore a glass stuck in his eye, a little round-like hat,
A coat that had a belt about, and stockings to the knee.
He shore did have the quarest turn I might' nigh ever see.
He was right tall an' powerful thin, an' kindly gitting old.
When he stopped there beside the road, I asked him what he sold.
I 'lowed he was some travelling-man. He had a little pack
All fastened up with straps an' things, he carried on his back.
That 'peared to tickle him a lot. He laughed an' waved his hand,
Then jabbered some strange furrin words I couldn't understand.
But pretty soon I made it out, of all unlikely things,
He'd come down here to gather up them songs our children sings—
Them silly little ballet-songs, like 'Lone an' Lonesome Low,'
'The Bailiff's Daughter o' Islington,' 'Brown Gal,' an' 'Jackaro.'
I told him then our eldest gal, Lurany, knowed a sight
O' such-like songs, an' said for him to come an' take a night.
I kindly liked the feller's looks, wanted to hear him talk
About the war. He said he'd come. 'Bout six we seed him walk
Along the branch an' up the path. I made him take a chair,
Then he pulled out an' lit a pipe, like my ole woman there.
Well, supper was ready right at once, but when we'd eat an' quit,
I said we'd move in by the fire, an' sing about a bit.
Lurany, an' her sister Sue, set down there on the bed,
An' started in right smart to howl the songs the stranger said,
And one it seemed he'd never heard, 'The Inconstant True Lover.'
He liked that more than all the rest, an' made 'em sing it over
A dozen times, or maybe more, an' wrote it in a book.
I hitched my chair across the floor an' tried to git a look
To see them silly words put down in writing, but, landsake,
All I could see was little marks like tracks the chickens make.
Then pretty soon, when them two gals had sung up all they knew,
It sort o' came upon my mind I had a song or two,
Or used to have, when I was young, an' cut an' awful swell:

'John Henry, the Steel-Driving Man,' 'Cuckoo,' an' 'Drunkard's Hell.'
 I thought pime-blank he'd like that last. It was my favorite.
 'Garbage!' he cried, when I began. That made me want to fight.
 I started in to take that dude an' lay him out there flat.
 I'd never let no furriner run over me like that!
 But them two gals jumped off the bed, pinned me an' held me back
 I 'lowed the feller'd leave right then, light out, an' hit the track.
 But law, he warn't a bit a-feered, just stood still on the floor,
 An' looked around. Then, sudden like, he spied my dulcimore.
 It hung up on the fireboard there, above my rifle-gun.
 I'd had a mind to trade it off for fiddle or banjo, one,
 But seemed I couldn't bring myself to let the old thing go.
 I always liked to hear the sound it made, so sweet an' low,
 Though Sue turns up her nose at it—she picks the organ fine—
 An' begs at me to order a guitar or mandoline.
 'What in the deuce do you call that?' he cried, an' dropped his book,
 Then polished up his little glass to git a better look.
 I clean forgot that I was mad, retched up an' took it down.
 It sort o' tickled me to see a feller from the town
 Who'd never seed a dulcimore. I went an' cut a quill,
 Then set right there an' picked fer him an hour or two, until
 'Twas time fer laying down in bed. Next morning, when he woke
 What do you reckon 'twas he said, the firstest word he spoke?
 'I shore must have that dulcimore,' an' asked me what I'd take.
 I figgered what a fiddle'd cost, an' if I couldn't make
 Another dulcimore as good, if I should take a spell
 O' rheumatiz around next fall, then told him how I'd sell.
 I kindly thought he'd try to trade, and named it pretty high.
 But, boys, he never said a word, an' never bat an eye,
 Jest paid the money, said goodbye, an' shook hands all around.
 (He claimed we was the cleverest folks he'd might' nigh ever found,)
 Then buckled on his little pack, picked up the dulcimore,
 An' started down the branch. He was a quare-turned feller, shore!

Invitations

Howdy, boys, howdy, we've gathered the corn,
The hogs' on the mast, an' the sheep is all shorn.
Now is the season for frolic an' fun.
Let's git us a squirrel, I'll gi' ye a gun.
I know where's a plenty, an' not far to seek.
Then come along *wi'* me, boys, on up the creek!

Howdy, boys, howdy, the shades come across.
It's late to be stirring abroad on a horse.
Now is the time o' the day for a seat
By the fire, while the women folks fry us some meat.
I've killed a fat hog, an' I love ye a sight.
So come along *wi'* me, boys, come take a night!

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